

Sunset

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Fall pumpkins

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OCTOBER 2007

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Front Range foray

An autumn road trip offers a great taste of Colorado

BY TED ALAN STEDMAN

GOLDEN CORNSTALKS and rotund jack-o'-lanterns with wicked, toothy grins. Crinkled red, yellow, and orange leaves glowing iridescent under a low arcing sun. Flaxen farm fields where raucous crows pick at leftovers. Soft cool breezes, seeing your breath, and warm sweaters.

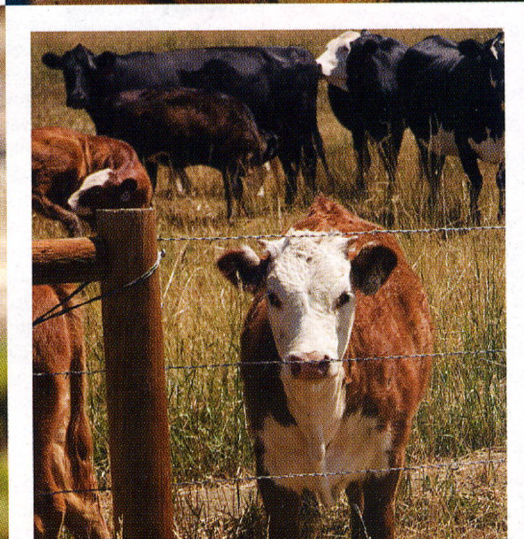
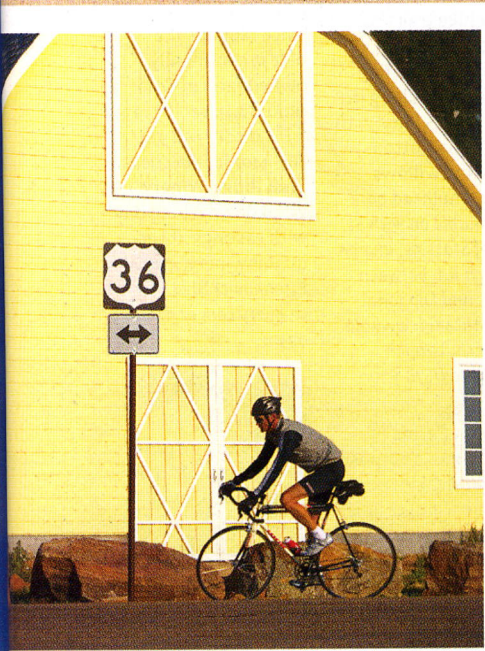
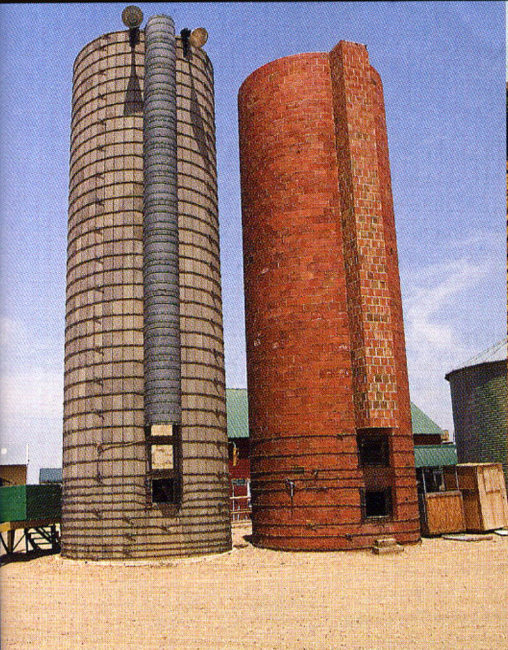
When fall arrives in Colorado, it's as if the land goes straight from the oven onto a shaded farmhouse windowsill chilled by a crisp morning frost. But before the season slides toward winter hibernation and spring rejuvenation, a big, beautiful bounty unfolds along the Front Range.

My gal, Tami, and I intend to mosey around this western fringe of America's heartland at an easy pace. Plans? Not really. Just stick to the mostly 45 mph backroads lacing farms, communities,

Scenes from the road in Colorado's Front Range: pumpkin harvest in Longmont. **TOP ROW** Silos at Anderson Farms; fields spread across the countryside; a taste of Trail Ridge Winery in Loveland. **MIDDLE ROW** Cycling U.S. 36 near Lyons; stopping at one of

countless produce stands. **BOTTOM ROW** Capturing an icon of fall; a resident of Lohr-McIntosh Farm; the entrance to the Anderson Farms' corn maze, the oldest in the state: Tell a friend where you're going.





Travel bonus

and pastoral outposts between Boulder and Loveland, and let Providence be our guide.

A fresh start

East of Boulder, our first stop is Cure Organic Farm, where a massive willow tree stands radiant in fall plumage. At least a dozen other folks are dotting over stacks of beautiful veggies, just as customers have been doing since the '60s when the Ellis family first set up picnic tables loaded with sweet corn, tomatoes, and winter squash beneath the same willow tree.

By noon, we're roaming the bountiful stands of more than 50 Colorado farmers at the Boulder Country Farmers' Market in downtown Boulder. I count 15 types of cucumbers and 8 different eggplants. There's garlic and blood red chile ristras, and, of course, pumpkins and squash, ranging from tiny ornamentals to some behemoths.

An alfresco lunch at nearby Prima Ristorante revitalizes us before we turn northeast into the farmland of Boulder County and beyond. Cottonwoods in full fall regalia line languid waterways where horses browse for grass. Seas of withering cornstalks await the plow. It's easy to get absorbed in a Midwest mindset, complete with red barns, green tractors, and prim white farmhouses.

On the car radio, we hear a local farm channel bit about Osborn Farm in Loveland—that some of Colorado's biggest and best pumpkins are at their peak. We're game, so on the outskirts of town, we roll onto the 120-acre farm, ending up surrounded by orange orbs on a scale that's particularly impressive when we consider that each vine seedling was hoed by hand.

We stumble across cozy-looking Trail Ridge Winery, almost hidden from the highway by a gallery of trees exploding in color. Inside, we get to the business of sampling and savoring a little wine with new friends, plotting tomorrow's route.

Falling for the season

A southbound checkerboard route of country roads lands us at the Agricultural Heritage Center at the Lohr-McIntosh Farm, west of Longmont. Now in the public domain and restored with Colorado Historical Society funds, the spread is a living snippet of Colorado's pioneer history.

Southbound again, and after checking into the exquisitely detailed Niwot Inn, we search the Internet for Boulder County "agri-tainment" and are led to Anderson Farms, due east from Niwot by maybe 5 miles.

It's a three-ring circus, family farm-style, with a ticket window; livestock, including a 2,000-pound buffalo named Miles; antique tractors and wagon trains; a goofy haunted hayride; and a huge corn maze (that conquers us).

On the drive home the next day, I think about how I've always seen Colorado through the prism of its mountains, its skiing, climbing, and other hard-charging activities. But there's a wonderful subtlety to autumn. The land's metabolism slows, shadows lengthen, and the cycle of a season culminates in harvests and celebration in preparation for the hardships of winter.

Harvests and celebrations, family and friends. I can fall for that.

Where to dine

BOULDER

Prima Ristorante
Colorado-native chef Kevin Taylor brings a new twist on Italian classics at the chic eatery. Just one block from the Boulder County Farmers' Market, it's our fave for a post-market brunch. \$\$; closed Sun; 1801 13th St.; 303/247-0600.

NIWOT

Garden Gate Cafe
Lycra bike shorts and helmet hair aren't fashion faux pas at the casual cycle-centric eatery, which is perfect for recharging on the patio after local riding. Espresso bar, huge breakfasts, and well-executed comfort foods spanning the lunch hour. \$; 7960 Niwot Rd., Ste. B4 (in Cottonwood Square); 303/652-8595.

LONGMONT

Pumphouse Brewery & Restaurant
Longmont's answer to trendy LoDo brew pubs. Recommendations? Fish tacos, grilled three-beer brats, cilantro and lime shrimp tacos. \$\$\$; 540 Main St.; 303/702-0881.

What to see and do

BOULDER

Boulder County Farmers' Market
Colorado's largest farmers' market is in its 22nd season. Everything from vegetables, fruits, flowers, and plants to gourmet cheeses and wines. 4-8 p.m. Wed, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat; 13th St. between Arapahoe Ave. and Canyon Blvd.; boulderfarmers.org or 303/910-2236.

Cure Organic Farm
See what may be the best local example of a community farm connecting with its residents, distributing all produce within a 50-mile radius. Stock up on goodies at the Farm

Stand, where you'll find carrots, onions, tomatoes, and most any in-season produce. 7416 Valmont Rd.; cureorganicfarm.com or 303/666-6397.

NIWOT

Medovina Colorado Honey Wine
Flower, nectar, honey, and mead. Book a winery appointment with owner-beekeeper-vintner Mark Beran. By appointment only; no tasting fee; medovina.com or 303/845-3090.

Niwot Loop Trail
Take the mellow 3.7-mile bike or hike trail that meanders through pastures, prairie dog colonies, and along irrigation canals lined with magnificent cottonwoods and willows. Drive-to trailhead parking available on 79th St. north of State 52, and on Monarch Rd. between 79th St. and Diagonal Hwy./State 119; www.co.boulder.co.us/open space or 303/678-6200.

ERIE

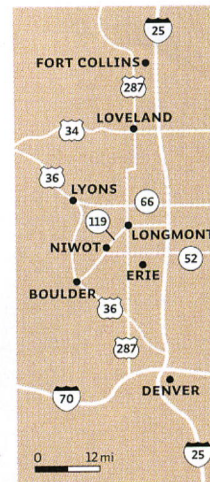
Anderson Farms
Agri-tainment outpost on a real-deal working farm. \$20, \$15 ages 4-12; 6728 Weld County Rd. 3 1/4, Erie; andersonfarms.com or 303/828-5210.

LONGMONT

The Agricultural Heritage Center at the Lohr-McIntosh Farm
Roam at will or take guided tours. Either way, you'll get an inkling of that indomitable pioneer spirit at the wonderfully restored, historically accurate homestead farm. Fri-Sun through Oct 28; guided tours start at 11 a.m.; free; 8348 Ute Hwy./State 66 (west of Longmont); www.co.boulder.co.us/openspace or 303/776-8848.

LOVELAND

Osborn Farm
It's all about pumpkins here. Owned and operated



by the same family since 1861, it's the oldest continually owned farm in Colorado. \$0.25 per lb.; 1933 S.E. 14th St.; call 970/669-4407 for directions.

Trail Ridge Winery
Wind down a long day with tastings at the quaint winery. 4113 W. Eisenhower Blvd.; trwinery.com or 970/635-0949.

Where to stay

NIWOT

Niwot Inn
The post-and-beam staircase, custom woodwork, plush fine leather furniture, and distinctive individual rooms named after Colorado's highest peaks all lend their charm to the stately inn surrounded by towering cottonwoods and sprawling agricultural fields. From \$139, including breakfast; 342 Second Ave.; niwotinn.com or 303/652-8452.

LOVELAND

Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch
On the banks of the Big Thompson River, the tasteful dude ranch's 12 cabins range from cozy to semipalatial. From \$99, including breakfast; about 13 miles west of I-25 on U.S. 34 between mileposts 83 and 84, just before entering Big Thompson Canyon; sylvandale.com or 877/667-3999.

It's easy to get absorbed in a Midwest mindset, complete with red barns, green tractors, and prim white farmhouses

A barn near Boulder marks the meeting place of the Flatirons and the Great Plains.

